



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Behring Center

News

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National Museum of American History Explores the Voting Process

--Features Infamous Votomatic with a Butterfly Ballot from 2000 Florida Election--

With butterfly ballots, hanging-chads, and a presidential election remaining undecided for weeks, the 2000 election caused millions of Americans to question the country's voting process. In response, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History is planning a new exhibition, titled "Vote: The Machinery of Democracy." Scheduled to open July 16, the exhibition will highlight the evolution and progression of voting techniques and technology and is scheduled to run through the 2005 Presidential Inauguration. A companion Web site, designed by Behavior, will be available at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote>.

In the weeks following the election of 2000, many citizens called for sweeping reforms of the voting process. The exhibition will examine how Americans have historically adopted improved voting techniques as a result of the political, social and technological changes in the country.

"The exhibition's key message is one that every school-boy and school-girl has been taught—every vote counts," said Brent D. Glass, director of the museum.

While the concept of one person-one vote seems simple, as the last election demonstrated, it is not always as straightforward as it appears.

"This exhibition will be about how at different times the American public has tried to solve this simple, but very central issue confronting our democracy," said Larry Bird, curator of political history.

"Vote: The Machinery of Democracy" will draw upon the museum's vast political history collection and will include new acquisitions from the 2000 election. Among the objects to be featured are a prototype 1962 "Votomatic" from the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California, Berkeley and the infamous

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“Votomatic” with a butterfly ballot that was used in Palm Beach County, Fla., in 2000. The exhibition will also display a wooden 19th-century ballot box and an early gear-and-lever voting machine.

Visitors can cast “ballots” in an interactive portion of the exhibition via a ballot box, a model gear-and-lever machine or a DataVote punch card vote recorder. In addition to the examination of technological changes in voting, the exhibition will explore how a growing electorate gave rise to fears of increased corruption and fraud.

The 2004 election cycle is expected to be one of the most engaging for the American people. The Florida recount controversy of the 2000 presidential election inspired many jurisdictions to reevaluate, improve or replace their existing technologies, resulting in new controversies as the pros and cons of emerging technologies are evaluated. The exhibition will also look at the security and verification features of current and future ballots.

The National Museum of American History traces American heritage through exhibitions of social, cultural, scientific and technological history. Collections are displayed in exhibitions that interpret the American experience from Colonial times to the present. The museum is located at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 25. For more information, visit the museum’s Web site at <http://americanhistory.si.edu> or call (202) 633-1000 or 357-1729 (TTY).

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